

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

OLD THIRTEEN TO TH' DOZEN

Harry Stanworth, known as Old Thirteen to th' Dozen, was a notorious poacher who lived in Monk Hall during the residence of the Parkers at Extwistle Hall. Harry's obsession with poaching led him into countless encounters with the law, but his most memorable tale began with a stroke of luck.

One moonlit night, Harry ventured out on his poaching expedition and found extraordinary success. He managed to catch twelve hares, an impressive haul by any standard. But Harry's greed knew no bounds. He couldn't resist the temptation to make it an even thirteen. So, he persevered until he finally achieved his goal.

However, just as Harry was securing his thirteenth hare, the gamekeepers descended upon him, their torches illuminating the darkness. They confiscated the hares and promptly brought him before Mr. Parker, the stern owner of Extwistle Hall. Harry, ruefully contemplating his ill-fated ambition, muttered to himself, "Ther's no luck wi thirteen to th' dozen."

Despite this setback, Harry's poaching days were far from over. On another occasion, he found himself ensnared by the law once again. This time, when he stood before Mr. Parker, the man remarked with a mix of resignation and reproach, "Well, Harry, you've come again."

Harry, acknowledging his guilt, replied humbly, "I am, maister."

Mr. Parker decided to give Harry another chance. He laid out his conditions for the old poacher, a chance for redemption. Harry was to attend Burnley Church every Sunday without fail, with Mr. Parker warning him sternly that any deviation would be met with severe consequences. In return, he would receive a weekly allowance of five shillings, as long as he abandoned poaching and upheld his end of the bargain.

Eager for a fresh start and swayed by the generous terms, Harry agreed to the conditions. Grateful for this unexpected opportunity, he left Extwistle Hall with a sense of hope and determination. As he journeyed home, he couldn't help but feel a profound sense of gratitude towards his forgiving patron, a sentiment that deepened as he clutched the hare Mr. Parker had gifted him.

For a time, Harry remained true to his word. He faithfully attended church every Sunday, resisting the pull of his old ways. The five shillings provided him with a modest but steady income, enough to sustain him and quell the temptation that haunted him.

But alas, the allure of poaching proved too strong. The old instincts that ran through his veins resurfaced, whispering tantalizing promises of adventure and triumph. Harry found himself yearning for just one more night, one more catch.

With his resolve weakened, he set out once more, convinced that he could outsmart the gamekeepers. Yet fate had other plans. Before long, Harry was caught in the act, his nets and snares serving as damning evidence against him. Once again, he found himself standing before Mr. Parker, shame etched across his weathered face.

"It's no use," Harry admitted, his voice tinged with defeat. "I can't help it, it runs i' th' blood. I do like to catch a hare, master. You mun forgive me, and I'll try to do better."

Mr. Parker, his patience tested but not entirely depleted, sighed and looked at the remorseful old man before him. He realized that mere promises held no weight against ingrained habits. With a mixture of disappointment and resignation, he decided against punitive measures and instead issued a cautionary admonition.

"You must understand, Harry," Mr. Parker spoke sternly, "that forgiveness can only go

so far.

By Donald Jay